

**CLAIMS:**

1. A method for providing access to data files stored in a data repository comprising the steps of:

receiving a request for a data file from a requester said request specifying at least one data format;

determining if said requester is authorized to access said requested data file;

translating the requested data file from a stored data format into said requested data format responsive to said receiving of said request from said requester, if said stored format differs from said requested format; and

making said translated data file accessible to said requester if it is determined that said requester is authorized..

2. A method according to claim 1 wherein said data files include graphical information.

3. A method according to claim 1 wherein said requested data format represent a version of the data file that is compatible with a particular software application environment for using the requested data file.

4. A method according to claim 1 wherein the repository resides behind a secure firewall, and further including the steps of:

providing a meta data directory outside of said firewall; said meta data directory indicating the contents of the repository.

5. A method according to claim 4 further including the step of :

providing periodic updates of said meta data directory, said updates reflecting changes to data in the data repository.

6. A method according to claim 1 wherein said determining step further including the steps of:

providing an access control element including data indicating whether a requester is to be permitted to access said requested data file.

7. A method according to claim 1 wherein said repository resides behind a secure firewall and wherein said translated data file is retained at a response repository outside of said firewall in response to said request.

8. A method according to claim 7 wherein said data file is retained at said response repository for a predetermined time period.

9. A method according to claim 8 wherein said data file is accessible from said response repository by any authorized requester.

10. A method according to claim 1 wherein said repository resides behind a secure firewall the method further comprising the steps of:

providing an access control system outside of said firewall for receiving said request for said data file;

determining via said access control system if the requested data file is stored in the repository;

and

passing said request to said repository if said requester is authorized and said requested data file is stored in said repository.

11. A method according to claim 10 wherein said translated data file is retained at a response repository outside of said firewall in response to said request.

12. A method according to claim 11 wherein said translated data file is retained at said response repository for a predetermined time period.

13. A method according to claim 12 wherein said translated data file is accessible from said response repository by any authorized requester.

14. A method according to claim 13 wherein said translating step is undertaken at said response repository.

15. A method according to claim 14 wherein said translated file retained at said response repository may be further translated based upon requests from said authorized requesters.

16. A method according to claim 10 further including the steps of:

receiving said request at a staging database within said firewall;

determining based on said received request which of said stored data formats is to be used to perform said translating into said requested file format; and

using the results of said determination to retrieve the data file having the determined format from said repository.

17. A method according to claim 16 further comprising the step of:

providing said translated data file from said repository to said staging database.

18. A method according to claim 17 wherein said access control system includes a response repository and wherein said translated data file is transferred from said staging database to said response repository and retained at the response repository in response to said request.

19. A method according to claim 18 wherein said translated data file is retained at said response repository for a predetermined time period.

20. A method according to claim 19 wherein said translated data file is accessible from said response repository by any authorized requester.

21. A method according to claim 1 further comprising the steps of:

providing the requester with the status of the fulfillment of the request for the data file.

22. A method according to claim 1 further comprising the steps of

providing an indication of stored formats for the requested data file; and

storing a requester's format preferences for the requested data file.

23. A program storage device readable by a digital processing apparatus and tangibly embodying a program of instructions executable by the digital processing apparatus to perform method steps for providing access to data files stored in a data repository, the method comprising the steps of:

receiving a request for a data file from a requester said request specifying at least one data format;

determining if said requester is authorized to access said requested data file;

translating the requested data file from a stored data format into said requested data format responsive to said receiving of said request from said requester, if said stored format differs from said requested format; and

making said translated data file accessible to said requester if it is determined that said requester is authorized..

24. A program storage device according to claim 23 wherein said data files include graphical information.

25. A program storage device according to claim 23 wherein said requested data format represents a version of the data file that is compatible with a particular software application environment for using the requested data file.

26. A program storage device according to claim 23 wherein the repository resides behind a secure firewall, and further including the steps of:

providing a meta data directory outside of said firewall; said meta data directory indicating the contents of the repository.

27. A program storage device according to claim 26 further including the step of :

providing periodic updates of said meta data directory, said updates reflecting changes to data in the data repository.

28. A program storage device according to claim 23 wherein said determining step further including the steps of:

providing an access control element including data indicating whether a requester is to be permitted to access said requested data file.

29. A program storage device according to claim 23 wherein said repository resides behind a secure firewall and wherein said translated data file is retained at a response repository outside of said firewall in response to said request.

30. A program storage device according to claim 29 wherein said data file is retained at said response repository for a predetermined time period.

31. A program storage device according to claim 30 wherein said data file is accessible from said response repository by any authorized requester.

32. A program storage device according to claim 23 wherein said repository resides behind a secure firewall the method further comprising the steps of:

providing an access control system outside of said firewall for receiving said request for said data file;

determining via said access control system if the requested data file is stored in the repository; and

passing said request to said repository if said requester is authorized and said requested data file is stored in said repository.

33. A program storage device according to claim 32 wherein said translated data file is retained at a response repository outside of said firewall in response to said request.

34. A program storage device according to claim 33 wherein said translated data file is retained at said response repository for a predetermined time period.

35. A program storage device according to claim 34 wherein said translated data file is accessible from said response repository by any authorized requester.

36. A program storage device according to claim 35 wherein said translating step is undertaken at said response repository.

37. A program storage device according to claim 36 wherein said translated file retained at said response repository may be further translated based upon requests from said authorized requesters.

38. A program storage device according to claim 32 further including the steps of:

receiving said request at a staging database within said firewall;

determining based on said received request which of said stored data formats is to be used to perform said translating into said requested file format; and

using the results of said determination to retrieve the data file having the determined format from said repository.

39. A program storage device according to claim 38 further comprising the step of:

providing said translated data file from said repository to said staging database.

40. A program storage device according to claim 39 wherein said access control system includes a response repository and wherein said translated data file is transferred from said staging database to said response repository and retained at the response repository in response to said request.

41. A program storage device according to claim 40 wherein said translated data file is retained at said response repository for a predetermined time period.

42. A program storage device according to claim 41 wherein said translated data file is accessible from said response repository by any authorized requester.

43. A program storage device according to claim 23 further comprising the steps of:

providing the requester with the status of the fulfillment of the request for the data file.

44. A program storage device according to claim 23 further comprising the steps of

providing an indication of stored formats for the requested data file; and

storing a requester's format preferences for the requested data file.

45. An apparatus for providing access to data files stored in a data repository, said apparatus comprising:

an interface element for receiving a request for a data file from a requester said request specifying at least one data format;

an access control logic couple to said interface for determining if said requester is authorized to access said requested data file;

a translation engine coupled to said access control logic for translating the requested data file from a stored data format into said requested data format responsive to said receiving of said request from said requester, if said stored format differs from said requested format; and

a storage element coupled to said translation engine for making said translated data file accessible to said requester if it is determined that said requester is authorized..